

PACIFIC HERRING (<u>Clupea pallasii</u>) SPAWNING GROUND PRODUCTION IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA, 1976

By: Dennis Blankenbeckler

1976

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Data presented in these reports is intended to be final, however, some revisions may occasionally be necessary. Minor revision will be made via errata sheets. Major revisions will be made in the form of revised reports.

# PACIFIC HERRING (Clupea pallasii) SPAWNING GROUND PRODUCTION IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA, 1976

Ву

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#### INTRODUCTION

This is the first in a series of annual reports designed to discuss herring (Clupea pallasii) spawn production in Southeastern Alaska. General aerial surveys on major spawning stocks including two detailed comprehensive surveys are summarized and discussed. Expansion and development of herring sac roe fisheries in Southeastern Alaska have promoted these studies.

# Historical Spawning Ground Surveys

In 1930 the spawning grounds were documented for the first time in Southeastern Alaska by Rounsefell (1930). Updating these early surveys was accomplished in the 1950's by intensive aerial and ground surveys resulting in estimation of egg densities, spawning distribution, predation levels and spawning substrate (Montgomery 1957, '58, '59, '60 and Skud 1959).

Since 1960 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has conducted annual aerial surveys to monitor herring spawn in terms of linear miles. Effort and intensity of surveys has varied considerably over the years. Limited surveys by skiff and attempts to quantify deposition was accomplished in the 1960's, and again under a newly created Southeastern herring research project initiated in 1969. Results of available information in terms of an index of linear miles of beach receiving spawning is shown in Table 1.

### Biological Studies

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, recognizing the commercial interest in herring sac roe, has initiated comprehensive spawning ground studies. It is obvious that general aerial surveys denoting presence of spawn are not adequate to evaluate spawning success in Southeastern Alaska. Therefore, pilot studies in 1976 were designed to collect herring life history information and determine the feasibility of estimating the number of spawning herring from their egg deposition. This quantificable data will be used as ground truth to hydroacoustical estimates made prior to spawn, as a source for estimating egg mortality and as a base for determining harvest quotas. Life history information includes the following:

- 1. Vegetation type and herring preference.
- 2. Determination of egg densities for varied substrates.
- 3. Timing and temperature of spawning.
- 4. Egg development.
- 5. Estimates of egg mortality for various densities and substrates.

Table 1. Summary of linear miles of beach receiving herring spawn in Southeast Alaska.

YEAR AND LINEAR MILES OF BEACH SPAWN OBSERVED

LOCATION	1953 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 196	1 1962 1963 1964 1965 1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976
CRAIG	12.2 11.7 13.6 11.6 11.5 12.6 3.5	11.5 11.2 12.3 14.2 12.4 9.2 11.7 4.5 7.5 7.1
KAH SHAKES SHOPE NAKAT	7.9 9.2 3.4 2.5 5.7 7.0	9.5 6.0 11.0 9.5
CLEVELAND PENN. BEHM CANAL	5.9 6.4 3.5 5.9 7.8 5.5	2.0 3.0 1.0.2.0 1.0
ERMEST SOUND ROCKY BAY	7.5 2.6	3.0 3.0 3.0
AUKE BAY LYNN CANAL	E.2 9.4 12.2 10.0 28.1 24.1 10.8 12.9	11.5 - 8.3 10.6 13.2 10.9 14,
SITKA	100.079.8 92.8 45.9 44.5	19.2 20.8 23.0 15.0 16.5 15.0 11.3 13.1 10.8 7.5 8.5 8.0 16.0
SEYMOUR CADAL		3.0 4.5 3.2
HYLABURG McFARLAND IS.		8.0 9.0 7.8 5,0 4.5 4.0 1.8 .7
KWAIN BAY HAM ISLEND		3.0 3.0 3.0
KASSAN BAY		4.0 1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0
HOOD & CHAIK BAY		1.5 10.0 2.0 1.7 3.4 2.3
GAMBIER BAY		.5
SKAGWAY HBR.		. 1.0
DAVIDSON IN. MARBLE IS.		1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0
PORT CAMDEN	·	0.29

This baseline information will be used to develop an efficient, feasible survey method for annually assessing herring escapement and spawning ground conditions.

#### METHODS

# Collection of Samples

Divers were used to collect samples documenting certain biological and physical parameters on established transect lines.

Spawning study areas were delineated by systematic aerial surveys in two known spawning areas near Ketchikan and Sitka. Once the spawning area was delineated transects were established at 1/2 mile intervals. A total of 15.75 miles of beach spawning area was comprehensively sampled. Transect lines were set perpendicular to the shore and marked at 5 meter intervals. Divers followed the transect lines until spawn or vegetation disappeared. The majority of transects were surveyed near low tide levels requiring only shallow dives. The transect line was then followed back to the beach documenting depth, temperature, and substrate type and composition. In areas where spawn occurred all vegetation and spawn was collected in a 0.1 square meter sample every 10 meters. In areas where spawn width was narrow (less than 20 meters) samples were taken every 5 meters. A 0.1 square meter sample was collected from a perforated 3/4" plastic pipe frame. Standard diving depth gauges, hand thermometers and underwater slates were used to collect and record other data. Where egg deposition occurred on rock or where unattached eggs occurred visual estimates of numbers were made for the 0.1 square meter sample.

## Laboratory Methods

Eggs were separated from the kelp by manual scraping and using a chemical process similar to that used in British Columbia. The chemical process used was as follows:

Preserve samples of spawn on substrate in Gilson's fluid, a fixative and preservative which hardens the eggs. The Gilson's fluid is of the following mixture:

3 gm Mercuric chloride 1 ml glacial acetic acid 3.75 ml 70% nitric acid Dissolved in 230 ml water and 15 ml alcohol The Gilson's fluid is then decanted from each sample and a IN KOH solution is added for 60-90 minutes to digest the adhesive material attaching the eggs. The sample container is then immersed in hot tap water. The separated eggs are then preserved in a buffered formol solution for 1 to 1-1/2 days. The buffered formol saline solution is then decanted from the sample.

Gilson's fluid is reapplied to each sample for a period of approximately 10-15 minutes; this hardens the eggs sufficiently to enable a volumetric analysis. Prolonged exposure of the eggs to the Gilson's fluid results in the eggs being dissolved. Therefore, a Gilson application of 10-15 minutes per sample is adequate, yielding an average displacement of 6 ml of water per 1,000 eggs. The Gilson's fluid is then decanted, the eggs are subsampled and densities determined by volumetric analysis. Limited gravimetric analysis was also used on eggs which were scraped from the kelp.

#### RESULTS

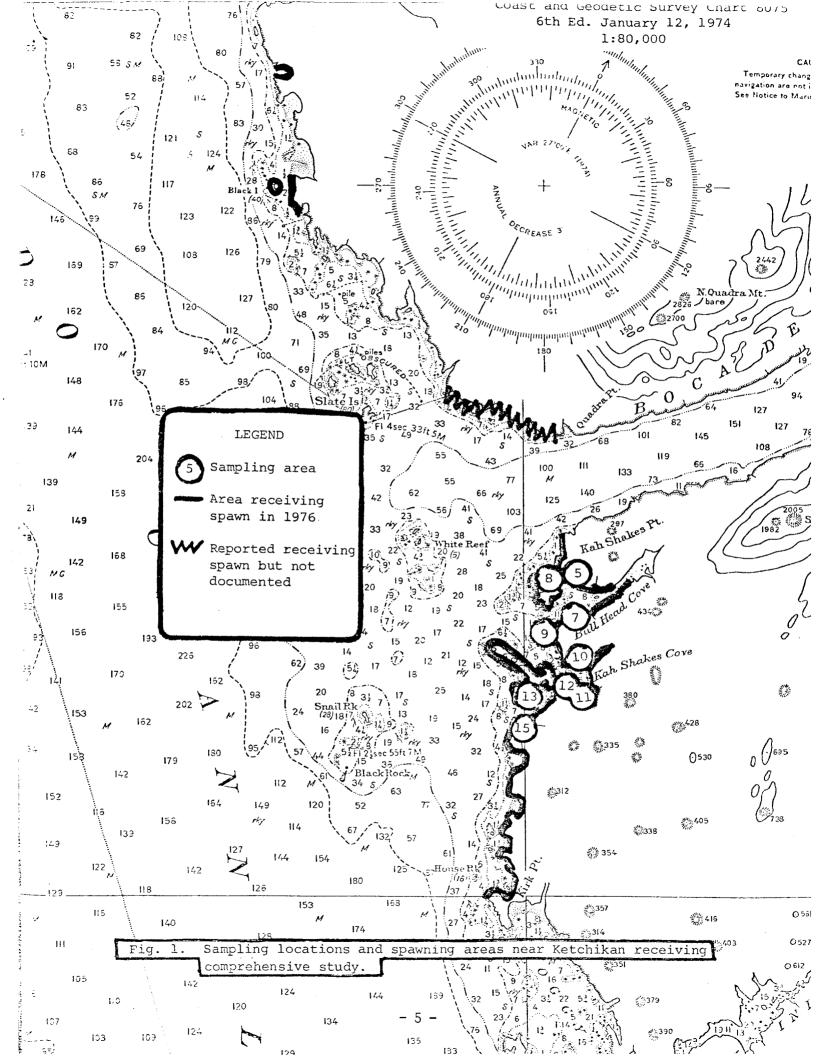
## <u>Ketchikan Comprehensive Study</u>

Spawning was documented on March 30, 31 and April 1, 2, 3 and 4 from Kah Shakes Point to Kirk Point for a distance of 8 linear beach miles. Spawning near Black Island was documented for 1.5 miles on April 26, 1976. A total of 9.5 miles of spawn was observed. A total of 20 transects were established at 0.5 mile intervals in the spawning area. Nine transects were completed for 5.25 miles of the total (Figure 1). Weather and time were responsible for not completing transects on the total area receiving spawn. Sampling was conducted on April 13, 14, 23 and 24 representing 14 man days of work.

Limited kelp and vegetation common to sandy beaches and semi-protected bays made up the majority of the spawning substrate. A diversity of kelp was observed only in two transects covering rocky substrates. Eel grass (Zostera marina) made up the majority of the spawning substrate. A narrow band of rock kelp (Fucus furcatus) was utilized in the upper intertidal area and incidental spawn was also recorded on sea lettuce (Ulva lactuca).

## Aquatic plants observed included:

Brown kelp	<u>Laminaria bullata</u>
Rock kelp	Fucus furcatus
Eel grass	Zostera marina
Sea lettuce	<u>Ulva lactuca</u>
Red dulse	Rhodymenia palmata forma mollis



Surface water temperature was  $41^{\circ}$  F at the start of spawning on April 13 and  $42^{\circ}$  F constant to the -30' tide line on April 23. On April 23 eggs were advanced with hatching predicted to commence in 1 or 2 days. The incubation period was determined to be 20-25 days at  $41^{\circ}$  F to  $42^{\circ}$  F. Sampling was inadequate to differentiate between incubation periods of sub versus upper intertidal areas.

Depth of spawning was observed from the +12 tide line to a -16' depth. The majority of spawn occurred on Zostera marina from 0 tide level to -10' depth.

Deposition ranged from 0 to 311,740 eggs per sample (0.1 square meter) averaging 377,020 per square meter. Deposition sampling indicated 364 billion eggs were present just prior to hatching (Table 2). This represents  $12.0 \times 10^6$  pounds of herring spawners. This number is determined by using the average fecundity for herring assuming an equal percentage of males and females in the population, and knowing the egg density of the spawning area. Egg mortality was not figured into the estimate, however, heavy gull predation was obviously occurring on the upper intertidal eggs. Egg mortality has been estimated as high as 70-80% in British Columbia (Outram 1961) and 25-40% in Southeastern Alaska (Montgomery 1958).

No herring larvae were observed during the surveys. One transect in Bullhead Cove revealed mounds of loose eggs located in sand depressions. These eggs were protected from the tidal surge and development seemed normal.

No degradation of the the spawning beds were noted in the area of the roe fishery. Highest egg densities were recorded in the area of the set gillnet fishery (Bullhead Cove).

No hydroacoustical estimate comparison could be made for this area.

# Sitka Comprehensive Study

Spawning was documented from April 14 until April 20 in Sitka Sound and the Windy Passage area on Baranof Island for a distance of 13 linear beach miles. A total of 20 transects were set up at 0.5 mile intervals in the spawning area. Eighteen transects were completed of the total. Weather was responsible for not completing the other two transects. Figure 2 illustrates the study area and Table 3 presents a summary of the transects and deposition calculations. Sampling was conducted on May 1 through May 7, 1976 representing 28 man days of work.

Eel grass (Zostera marina) was the most heavily utilized spawning substrate. A narrow band of rock kelp (Fucus furcatus) was utilized extensively in

Table 2. Summary of transects and deposition calculations for Ketchikan study area 1976.

						3449 meter	s			
			Т	ransect Nu	mber	(spaced a	t ½ mile	e interva	.ls)	
		5	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	15 = 9 transe
	30	x (-6	) a	* * * *	*	*	*	*	* * *	*
!	60			*					<b>1</b> x (-7	)   
,	90			* *						
	20	ate)		* *						<b>★</b> (-16')
(s 13.7 )	50	substrate)	(S	*		Eucus.)				
	80	ning ,	r Fucus)	narja. menia)	Eucus)	rock,		Laminaria)	aria)	
	10	· 441	, Ulva,	Laminar Rhodymen	rock, Eu	Laminaria,	, silt)		sand, <u>Laminaria</u> )	
2	40	sand,	sand,	sand			sand,	sand,	sand	sand)
	70	(Zostera,	(Zostera,	x (Zostera.	(Laminaria.	(Zostera,	(Zostera,	(Zostera,	(Zostera,	(Zostera,
3	00	5	7	x'(-6')	9	10	11	1.2	13	15
Aver							<del></del>			
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Samp.	le					·	<del></del>			. ,
		(m)10	10	10		<u> </u>		_	10	1.0
# of		_		2 ~	_		_	_	_	
Samp Widtl			4	15	0	0	00	0	6	11 = 39
Spawi		) 30	40 = 540	300 Average	0 = 60	0 meters	0	0	60	110 =

Average width = 60 m.

Length = 8449 m.

Spawning area = 506,940 sq. m.

Total study area deposition = 191,126,518,000 eggs

Total Ketchikan spawning area deposition = 364,065,592,800 eggs

 $<sup>^{\</sup>mathrm{a}}$  Maximum depth spawn observed from (0) or mean low tide level.

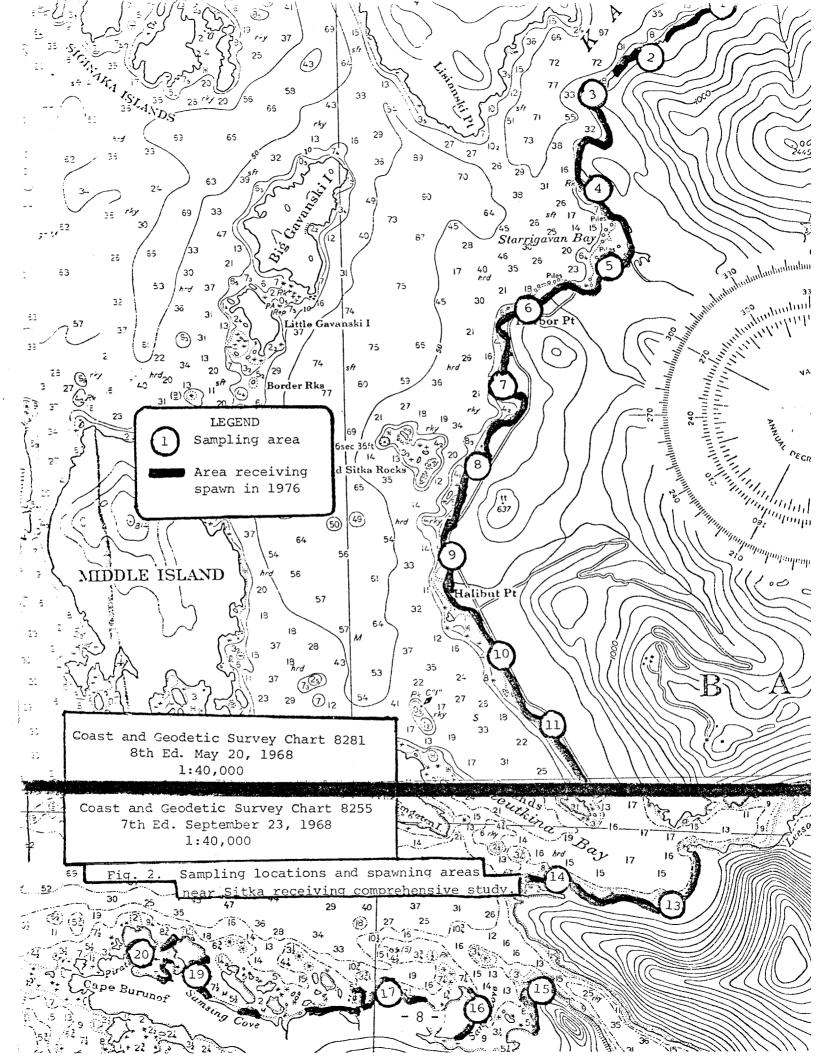


Table 3. Summary of transects and deposition calculations for Sitka study area 1976.

							(spaced at	1 <sub>2</sub> mi	le interva	ls)			<del></del>
<del> </del>			2	3	4	. 5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
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40						d)	k (-9'	)	Lithot	Lamir	donthalia)		
60	rate)		Ulva,		Ulva)	sand, mud)	sand)		Ulva,	Cyamathere,	O'   eg		
80	subst		aria, Ul rock)	<u>.i.a)</u>			Zostera,	(X)	naria,		Lamina	sand)	
100	(Spawning	rock)	Laminar adia, ro	Laminari	Laminaria,	Laminaria,		iia, rock)	t, Lamir	1, sand,	ous x(20		
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140									•		-		
Avera		1.	2	3	4	5	6	77	8	9	10	11	
Densi	-	66,100	38,157	0	1,677	0	27,734	0	15,535	17,142	2 72,263	0	= Total 238,608
Sample	е			· • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •				<u></u>					Average 238,608:1
# of !			5 3		5 3	0	10		10	10 8	10	12	21,691/.1 sq. met
Width	of		<del></del>			· · · · ·	*1	U	.L.4	3	10 =	43	<pre>1 sq. m. = 216,91   Average density.</pre>
Spawn		5	15	0	15	0	40	0	140	80	100 =	Total	L 395 m =

Average width = 36 m.

Length = 10,863 m.

Spawning area = 380,205 sq. m.

Total study area deposition =  $216,910 \times 380,205 = 82,470,266,550 \text{ eggs}$ .

Total Sitka spawning area deposition =  $216,910 \times 753,192 = 163,374,876,720$  eggs.

<sup>a</sup>Maximum depth spawn observed from (0) or mean low tide level.

the upper intertidal area. Other species of kelp were also used to a lesser degree (Table 4).

Numerous substrates were documented because of the occurrence of a rocky shore promoting a diversity of vegetation. One transect revealed spawn on giant kelp (Macrocystis integrifolia). Methods used to determine densities do not apply to Macrocystis due to the extreme size and branching of the kelp fronds from the bottom to the surface.

The surface water temperature was  $41^{\circ}$  F at the start of spawning. Temperatures ranged from  $44^{\circ}$  F to  $48^{\circ}$  F during May 1-7 prior to hatching (Table 5). On May 5 eggs were advanced with hatching predicted to commence in 1 or 2 days. On May 6 and 7 egg cases and herring larvae were observed in transects 12 through 20. These transects were not considered valid in determining egg densities. Incubation was estimated to be 20-25 days at  $41^{\circ}$  F to  $48^{\circ}$  F.

Depth of spawning was observed from the +8' tide line to -20'. The majority of spawn occurred from 0 tide level to -10'. Deposition ranged from 0 to 537,600 eggs per sample (0.1 square meter) averaging 216,910 eggs per square meter. Deposition sampling indicated 163 billion eggs were present prior to hatching. This represents  $5.4 \times 10^6$  pounds of herring. Predation or egg mortality was not evaluated.

No evidence of damage to vegetation was noted; the highest egg densities were observed in the area of the seine fishery near Halibut Point.

Hydroacoustical estimates conducted in March and early April, prior to the sac roe fishery, showed a high biomass of  $14.6 \times 10^6$  pounds of herring concentrated near the spawning ground. A harvest of  $1.6 \times 10^6$  pounds occurred on April 15, allowing an escapement of 13.0 million pounds. The deposition sampling did not account for  $7.6 \times 10^6$  pounds or 58%. A 58% egg mortality would not be considered abnormal based on other research in Southeast Alaska (25 to 40%, Montgomery 1958 and 70 to 80% in British Columbia, Outram 1961).

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Table 4. Kelp species observed and herring spawning occurrence observed in Sitka study area.

Aquatic Vege	tation	Herring Spawn
Common Name	Generic Name	Observed
Eel grass	Zostera marina	Х
Rock kelp	. Fucus furcatus	X
Hair kelp	Odonthalia floccosa	X
Sugar wrack	Laminaria saccharina	X
Blister wrack	Laminaria bullata	Х
Sea girdle	Laminaria groenlandica	х
Nail brush	Endocladia muricata	х
Sea lettuce	Ulva lactuca	x
Seersucker	Costaria costata	х
Soft tooth brush	Odonthalia lyallii	х
Sea spatula	Pleurophycus garidneri	Х
Triple rib	Cyamathere triplicata	Х
Polly Pacific	Polysiphonia pacifica	X
Giant kelp	Macrocystis integrifolia	· X
Red dulse	Rhodymenia palmata	
Sea sac	Halosaccion glandiformes	
Wing kelp	Alariavalida	
Sea staghorn	Codium fragile	
Sea colander	Agarum cribrosum	
Red rock crust	Lithothamnium	

Table 5 Summary of temperature profiles for Sitka comprehensive study May 1 to 7, 1976.

Date	Transect	Temp. F.	Depth Feet
5-1-76	1 "	45 "	surface 12
5-1-76	2	45 "	surface 20
5-1-76	4	48	surface 2 5
	n n	" " 45	6 8 10
	1) H H	43 " 42	15 20 25 35
5-5-76	11	48	surface 8
	n n	" "	10 12 15
	" " "	46 45	20 28 35
	li .	44	45
5-6 <b>-</b> 76	16	46	surface 2
	11	11 11	5 6 10
	1) 11	" 45	12 15
	11 11 11	11 11	20 25 36
5-7-76	19	46	surface 15

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